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11+ HALLOWEEN COMPREHENSION SPECIAL

The rain had stopped, but the streets of Hollow Lane still glistened beneath the orange glow of the streetlights. It was Halloween night, and most of the houses were decorated with grinning pumpkins, paper bats and tangled webs of cotton wool. Yet at the very end of the lane stood a house that appeared to have been forgotten by time.

Its windows were boarded up, its garden had surrendered to a wilderness of nettles, and its iron gate hung crookedly from a single hinge. Above the roof rose a narrow clocktower, its four faces permanently fixed at 11:47.



Maya had passed the house dozens of times, but tonight something was different. A pale yellow light flickered behind one of the upper windows.

“Probably a torch,” muttered Daniel, pulling his vampire cape tighter around his shoulders. “Or someone trying to frighten people. Come on.”

Maya did not move. She had always been curious about the house, particularly because her grandfather had once warned her never to enter it. When she had asked why, he had simply replied, “Some places remember things that people would rather forget.”

At the gate, Maya noticed a small brass plaque. Most of its lettering had been eaten away by rust, but three words remained visible: KEEP TIME RUNNING.

Before she could examine it further, the clocktower chimed.

The sound was deep and strangely uneven, as though the bell had been struck underwater. Maya counted eleven chimes. Then, after a pause, came a twelfth.

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The light in the upper window vanished.

Daniel laughed, but the sound was unconvincing. “Old buildings make noises. That's all.”

A sudden gust of wind pushed the gate open. Beyond it, a narrow path wound towards the front door. Despite the cold, Maya felt a bead of sweat slide down her neck. She told herself that fear was simply her imagination working overtime, yet her feet carried her forwards.

The front door stood ajar. Inside, the air smelled of damp wood and something faintly sweet, like flowers left too long in a vase. A grand staircase climbed into darkness, while dozens of clocks crowded the walls. Some had no hands; others spun backwards. Every one of them ticked at a different speed.

On a table lay a photograph of a young girl standing beside the clocktower. Maya picked it up and turned it over. On the back, written in faded ink, were the words: Eleanor Vale, October 31st, 1947. The night time stopped.

A floorboard creaked upstairs.

“Maya,” Daniel whispered, “we should go.”

From somewhere above them came a girl's voice.

“You're late.”

Maya froze. The words had been spoken softly, but they seemed to travel through the entire house. She looked at the photograph again. The girl in the picture wore a silver locket, and now Maya noticed the same locket resting on the table beside the clocks.

A second voice spoke, this time from the clocktower itself.

“Only one minute remains.”

Every clock in the house stopped ticking.

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Then the clock above the staircase began to move. Its minute hand crept towards twelve, while the second hand raced wildly around the dial. Maya suddenly understood the plaque at the gate. Perhaps the clocks were not keeping time trapped inside the house. Perhaps they were keeping something else from escaping.

Daniel grabbed her arm. “We're leaving. Now!”

But before Maya could answer, the front door slammed shut behind them.

And somewhere in the darkness, a clock began to count backwards.

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Choose the one best answer for each question.

1. What is the main effect of describing the house as having “surrendered to a wilderness of nettles”?

A. It suggests the garden has been carefully maintained.

B. It creates the impression that nature has taken over an abandoned place.

C. It shows that the house is surrounded by a forest.

D. It suggests that the residents enjoy gardening.

2. Why does Maya remember her grandfather's warning?

A. She wants to prove that he was mistaken.

B. She believes he has deliberately hidden a valuable object.

C. His mysterious words suggest that the house has a troubling history.

D. He has promised to meet her at the house.

3. What does the phrase “the sound was unconvincing” suggest about Daniel's laughter?

A. He finds the situation genuinely amusing.

B. He is trying to appear brave despite feeling uneasy.

C. He is angry that Maya has stopped walking.

D. He has forgotten why they came to the house.

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4. What is the most significant detail about the clocks inside the house?

A. They are all expensive antiques.

B. They are arranged according to their age.

C. They behave unnaturally, suggesting that time is not functioning normally.

D. They have been damaged by the storm.

5. What might the inscription “The night time stopped” suggest about Eleanor Vale?

A. She disliked celebrating Halloween.

B. She was involved in an unusual event connected to the house.

C. She was unable to read a clock.

D. She left the house because she disliked its decoration.

6. What is the most likely purpose of the final sentence?

A. To explain exactly what is hiding in the clocktower.

B. To show that Maya and Daniel have safely escaped.

C. To create suspense by suggesting that something dangerous or supernatural is beginning.

D. To reveal that the clocks have simply run out of power.

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Answer in full sentences and support your ideas with evidence from the passage.

7. Identify two details from the description of the house that make it seem abandoned or unsettling. Explain the effect of each detail.

8. How does the writer show that Maya is curious but also frightened? Give two examples from the passage and explain what they reveal about her character.

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9. Explain what is meant by the phrase “her feet carried her forwards”. Why is this an effective way of describing Maya's behaviour?

10. How does the writer use sound to build tension throughout the passage? Refer to at least three examples.

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11. What do you think the writer means when Maya wonders whether the clocks are "keeping something else from escaping"? Give a plausible interpretation and support it with evidence from the story.

12. How does the atmosphere change between the opening paragraph and the final paragraph? Explain how the writer creates this change through setting, events and language.

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Answers

Suggested answers for checking understanding. Written responses may vary if they are supported by evidence from the passage.

Section A: Multiple choice

1. B — The overgrown garden suggests that the property has been neglected and reclaimed by nature.
2. C — Her grandfather's warning hints at a disturbing history that Maya wants to understand.
3. B — Daniel's laughter sounds forced, suggesting that he is becoming frightened despite trying to appear confident.
4. C — The backwards-moving clocks and different ticking speeds suggest that time is behaving unnaturally.
5. B — The inscription implies that Eleanor experienced or witnessed a mysterious event connected to time.
6. C — The backwards countdown creates suspense and leaves the reader wondering what will happen next.

Section B: Written responses

7. Possible details include the boarded-up windows, overgrown garden, crooked iron gate and abandoned appearance. These details suggest neglect and isolation, making the house seem threatening and unwelcoming.

8. Maya's curiosity is shown when she remains at the gate to examine the plaque and later enters the house. Her fear is revealed when she feels sweat slide down her neck and freezes after hearing the girl's voice. These details show that her desire to discover the truth is stronger than her instinct to run away.

9. The phrase suggests that Maya moves forwards almost against her own judgement, as though her curiosity or the mysterious house is drawing her towards it. It is effective

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because it presents her actions as partly involuntary and increases the sense of supernatural influence.

10. The clocktower's deep, uneven chimes create an eerie atmosphere. The different ticking speeds of the clocks make the house feel unnatural. The girl's quiet voice creates suspense, while the final backwards countdown suggests approaching danger. These sounds make the reader increasingly anxious.

11. Maya suspects that the clocks may be containing a supernatural presence or preventing something dangerous from leaving the house. The warning on the plaque, the unusual clocks and the voice announcing that only one minute remains support this interpretation. The writer deliberately leaves the exact threat unexplained.

12. At the beginning, the atmosphere is mysterious and slightly eerie, created by the Halloween decorations, wet streets and abandoned house. As Maya and Daniel enter, the atmosphere becomes increasingly threatening through the unnatural clocks, the photograph, the disembodied voices and the slamming door. The final backwards countdown leaves the reader with a strong sense of danger and uncertainty.

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